

MEDIA RELEASE

Opera Queensland Launch their 2024 Season

BRISBANE – October 26, 2023 - Opera Queensland announces their 2024 Season with a splash of colour - setting the stage for a program that once again shows them leading the way when it comes to reimagining classic repertoire and commissioning new works.

Opening the year is a new festival, **Brisbane Bel Canto**, a week-long celebration of exquisite music from the bel canto period. Beginning with superstar Jessica Pratt showcasing her internationally renowned performance of **Lucia di Lammermoor**. Accompanied by her long-time collaborator and master of bel canto repertoire Richard Mills AM, conducting the Queensland Symphony Orchestra and the Opera Queensland Chorus, with direction by Patrick Nolan. This production will open and close the festival on 20 and 27 April at the Concert Hall QPAC.

Pratt has made the role of Lucia her own. Critics agree that there is currently no one better at delivering this tragic tale of a woman's romantic obsession whose passion knows no limits. This concert production will provide Brisbane audiences with their first opportunity to hear Jessica in the city she grew up in.

Beautiful singing is the lifeblood of opera. Brisbane Bel Canto has been created to provide audiences with an opportunity to encounter some of the finest singers alive today, revealing the wonder and virtuosity of a great voice in flight. This new festival provides a myriad of opportunities for people to experience opera at its most sublime. Be it the majesty of Jessica Pratt in Lucia or the intimacy of a long lunch created by Maggie Beer, for one week in April Brisbane will resound with glorious singing. Patrick Nolan, Artistic Director Opera Queensland

Pratt and Mills further collaborate for a special one-night-only concert, **Jessica Pratt in Concert**, that celebrates the music of Vincenzo Bellini. Pratt is joined by beloved tenors Carlos Bárcenas and Rosario La Spina with Queensland Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Mills. Hear music from *Norma*, including the famous "Casta diva" aria, *I Puritani* and the rarely performed *Beatrice di Tenda*.

In collaboration with Queensland Conservatorium Griffith University, the festival will present Gioachino Rossini's poignant masterpiece **Stabat Mater** featuring Eva Kong, Deborah Humble, Rosario La Spina and David Parkin. Mills conducts the Queensland Conservatorium Orchestra and a chorus of vocal students.



This hour-long performance is divided into twelve movements, each brimming with emotional intensity. From the hauntingly beautiful "Stabat Mater dolorosa", with its ethereal choral harmonies, to the fiery "Cujus animam gementem", the work weaves exquisite melodies, lush harmonies, and the composer's signature bel canto style, which elevates it beyond traditional liturgical music to reflect the text's profound sorrow and longing.

Brisbane Bel Canto festival goers will delight in the **Brisbane Bel Canto Long Lunch** where Maggie Beer, one of our best known and most celebrated cooks, is creating a special opera inspired menu, featuring local produce and the dessert created by Maggie in honour of Jessica Pratt – La Dolce, Jessica. Joined by the artists from Opera Queensland performing songs from the bel canto repertoire.

During May, Opera Queensland heads westward to the towns of Longreach and Winton with **Festival of the Outback Opera**. If you have yet to indulge in this uniquely Australian experience, we encourage you to join the community of music lovers from around Australia and the world who make the annual pilgrimage to the Outback to experience big voices and big skies.

Unlike any other music event you have experienced, the Festival of Outback Opera is a series of outdoor concerts in iconic locations and scenery on a grand scale. Events range from formal galas to casual singalongs in the pub, from large-scale concerts under night skies to afternoons of beautiful singing and fine dining. The program allows you to immerse yourself over a long weekend or completely give in to a full week of activities. While the space may be vast, the feeling is intimate, allowing audiences to explore opera in a new and highly accessible environment.

In July Opera Queensland re-connects with Circa in the production of **Dido and Aeneas**. The last time the two companies collaborated in 2019 they delivered the extraordinary and highly-successful *Orpheus and Eurydice*. Expect even more magic this time around as the tale about a pair of lovers, an evil sorceress and a doomed affair is given new life under the direction of Circa Artistic Director, Yaron Lifschitz. With a running time of just over an hour and lyrics sung in English, Henry Purcell's profoundly beautiful music will be perfectly complemented by an ensemble of Circa acrobatics. This is a production that will welcome broad audiences.

The chance to build on the success of Orpheus and Eurydice is thrilling and terrifying in equal measure. When Circa and Opera Queensland combine our forces, there is an alchemy. Two ground-breaking Queensland institutions fearlessly pursue the future. With Dido and Aeneas, we have the clash of desire and destiny, written in the character of Dido, brought to life by superb singers, embodied by the Circa Ensemble and set to some of the most moving music ever written. Yaron Lifschitz, Artistic Director CIRCA

Speaking of broadening horizons, the final 2024 Season mainstage production is the world-premiere of **Straight from the Strait**. This musical from the Torres Strait Islands pays homage to a group of remarkable Torres Strait Island workers on the vast expanse of the Mount Newman railway construction project who, on 8 May 1968, shattered world records as they laid down an astonishing 4.35 miles (almost 7 kilometres) of track in a single day, an unparalleled feat that still stands unchallenged. At the heart of their extraordinary achievement is the power of song – songs that are unique to Australia, that tell a passionate and inspiring story about the extraordinary men and women who ventured far from their island homes in pursuit of employment on the mainland.

This production reverberates with the power of song, a harmonious fusion of traditional Torres Strait music and contemporary melodies. Featuring vibrant ancestral languages like Miriam Mir, Kala Lagaw Ya and Torres Strait Creole combined with English language and the backbeat of a contemporary band, this production pushes the traditional definition of ‘opera’

Developed through collaboration and consultation with the Yumpla Nerkep Foundation and Torres Strait Island artists, Elders, and communities, this project is led by a team of First Nations creatives, performers, musicians, and cultural advisors. Presented by Opera Queensland, Yumpla Nerkep Foundation, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, in association with Brisbane Festival, *Straight from the Strait* will open Brisbane Festival in late August 2024 at QPAC.

This story is of personal importance to my family and many others from the Torres Strait, but it reveals a significant moment in history that all Australians can be proud of. Out of a strong sense of duty to their families, these men left their cultural ways – but together they found a new rite of passage through hard labour and teamwork. What an honour and privilege to have met with these Torres Strait Island railway legends and listen to their stories and songs. Their ‘work hard, play hard’ attitude have made them our ‘unsung heroes’.
Aunty Ruth Ghee.

Returning in 2024 is the **Opera Queensland Studio Series** offering audiences the opportunity to experience big voices in the intimate space of the Opera Queensland Studio. This year’s series of six productions offers a mix of genres, some with cabaret-style seating complete with refreshments with others set in a more formal atmosphere.

Launching in March with virtuosic pianist **Alex Raineri** and his new show, *Speechless*, that transforms beloved operatic highlights into virtuosic solo piano works. The repertoire will explore the genius of Mozart, the grandeur of Wagner, the passion of Verdi, the emotion of Puccini, and the elegance of Strauss.

Also in March, Papua New Guinean-Australian soprano **Heru Pinkasova** weaves her stories through reimagined Papuan folk songs, en route to the



classical canon, to create a soulful operatic cabaret, *Pacific Harmonies*. Heru has lovingly curated a collection of melodies that it is part opera, part tradition, part comedy.

After a winter break, the Studio Series jumps back into action. Starting with musical superstar and Helpmann Award winner **Amy Lehpamer**, who will deliver treats from both opera and Broadway genres, including a collection of songs from some of musical theatre's greatest hits.

Rising opera star **Eleanor Greenwood** and renowned Queensland artist **Shaun Brown** come together to celebrate the Opera Queensland Young Artist program. Graduating from the program some twenty years apart, they will tell stories of what it's like to set out on a career as a singer and what it's like to have an extraordinary career behind you.

Principal tenor with Opera Australia and one of Queensland great tenors, **Virgilio Marino** returns to Opera Queensland for a special recital of some of his favourite songs.

Closing out the Studio Series for the year is *A Window into Song* showcasing some of the most famous and beautiful operatic arias and Lieder from pivotal productions and concerts performed by tenor **Adrian Strooper**, who has recently returned to Australia from Germany, where he was for ten years a resident soloist at the Komische Oper Berlin.

There is nothing quite like being up close to a singer in full flight. The perfect acoustics of our studio provide the ideal setting for audiences to encounter the art of song and the artists themselves in a very intimate way. Once again, we have gathered some of the finest singers in Australia to present a program that will enchant and surprise in equal measure. Everyone walks away from our Studio performances feeling they have experienced something very special.
Patrick Nolan, Artistic Director Opera Queensland

Once again we are creating a production to take on the road for our 2024 reginal tour. This time we ask the question, **Do We Need Another Hero?** From the creative team of *Are You Lonesome Tonight* and *Lady Sings the Maroons*, this musical tribute takes us on a journey through the history of heroism. Contemporary chart toppers blend with well known opera arias about bravery from artists like The Beatles, David Bowie and Jimmy Barnes. The two-month tour will bring opera and song to the front door of twenty Queensland towns as it travels over 6,000kms.

Opera Queensland and Shake & Stir Theatre Co join forces again for the return of **Hansel & Gretel** in 2024 to delight primary school students with a tour across south east Queensland. Over 5000 students will have the opportunity to



experience opera for the first time in this beautiful reimagining of Humperdink's classic.

Sing with Opera Queensland workshops return in 2024 inviting singers of all ages to collaborate with leading principal performers and musicians, to broaden their personal and professional development skills including enhancing language, aural development, music-reading, opera history, and vocal technique. And for those singers looking for something a little less formal, a full season of the community sing-along series **Sing Sing Sing** will return to the bar at Bacchus Restaurant. Everyone is welcome to sing familiar themes from the world of opera and song.

Opera Queensland 2024 Season will be launched on 26 October at the Calile Hotel in Brisbane. Subscription tickets go on sale from 1 November. Single tickets available as of 20 November 2023.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

INSERT NAMES AND PHONE NUMBERS

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